

The Industrial Revolution Reading Notes

A. Introduction

The key development of the Industrial Revolution was the application of machine power to replace men and animals. Favorable supplies of natural resources and the spur of population growth helped to produce the first Industrial Revolution in Britain. Industrialization built on the commercial advantages Europe enjoyed in the world trade network and the developments of the scientific revolution.

B. Origins of Industrialization, 1770-1840

The initial inventions, such as James Watt's steam engine, that prompted the Industrial Revolution occurred in Britain. Each invention spawned new technological developments in related fields.

Transportation and communication innovations allowed products, people, and information to be moved more rapidly. Improved agricultural production fed the masses of workers who moved to the cities. Industrialization involved a shift in the organization of labor and the emergence of the factory system with its specialization of tasks and greater discipline. Industrialization also led to the creation of larger firms with greater access to capital and more advanced marketing techniques.

C.

Britain's industrialization attracted imitators in the United States, Belgium, France, and Germany. The French Revolution promoted industrialization by sweeping away laws that restricted trade.

D. The Disruptions of Industrial Life

Industrialization promoted movement from the country to the city. Family life was disrupted in the process. Workers found themselves packed into slums and subjected to harsh labor conditions. Workers responded to new conditions, in some cases with outright resistance, but failed to slow the pace of technological change. Factory owners attacked popular leisure activities as a means of gaining greater control over the work force. Family patterns changed.

For the middle class, women retreated from the labor force to take up duties in the domestic household. Attitudes toward children involved greater concern for education and a sense of childhood.

E. The Revolutions of 1848

While not all governments sponsored the process of industrialization as fully as did Britain, most supported railway construction and technological fairs. Governments became more actively involved in supplying public education and improving slum conditions in the cities. Workers also began to become more active in the political process. In Britain, the Chartist movement attempted to democratize representation in the British Parliament. In some cases, unfulfilled labor requests contributed to revolutionary movements. Beginning in 1848, revolutions broke out throughout continental Europe. A revolution in France unseated the monarch and briefly instituted a republic. Workers groups pressed for social and economic reforms. Revolutions followed in Germany, Austria, and Hungary, where liberals and nationalists pressed for national unification.

Socialist and nationalist movements failed in 1848. Prussian and Austrian armies restored the status quo in central Europe. In France, a nationalist empire rapidly replaced the republic. The revolutions of 1848 were the last major European rebellions. Industrialization replaced the old social order with a new one. The aristocracy and artisan class declined after 1850 to be replaced by new social divisions between the middle class and laborers. The new social organization helped to make revolution obsolete.